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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001790

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SUBJECT: SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS ELECTORAL REFORMS,
PREVIEWS RULING PARTY CONGRESS

REF: (A) HARARE 1335 (B) HARARE 1157

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

1. (C) SUMMARY: During a courtesy call by the Ambassador on October 26, Speaker of the Parliament and ZANU-PF Secretary for Administration Emmerson Mnangagwa outlined modest electoral reforms under consideration by the Parliament. He confirmed that the GOZ intended to implement reforms in time for the upcoming Parliamentary elections, which he confirmed would take place in March. He recited a familiar litany of ruling party achievements and objectives that he expected to shape the December ZANU-PF Party Congress. His reiteration of proposed electoral reform did not include anything that would address the fundamental flaws in the electoral process. His prescriptions for economic recovery hearkened back to failed command and control policies. All in all, the ever cordial Speaker broke little new ground and appeared to foreshadow no substantial change in GOZ policy in the run-up to next year's elections. END SUMMARY.

Implementing SADC Principles: Legislate Now, Change
Constitution Later

2. (C) In a parliamentary meeting room accompanied by Clerk of the Parliament Austin Zvoma and two notetakers, Mnangagwa reported that the current parliamentary session would wrap up no later than three months before the conduct of parliamentary elections. Elections would be conducted in March, as President Mugabe had announced, although a date had not been set. As speaker, Mnangagwa was coordinating the passage of a host of key GOZ priority bills, including an electoral reform bill that Mnangagwa characterized as implementing Zimbabwe's commitment to SADC electoral principles.

3. (C) Elaborating on the election, the Speaker noted that the Lancaster House Constitution gave the Government authority to run elections. Nonetheless, "SADC trends" were to move away from government-administered elections and the GOZ had agreed to follow that trend by appointing an "independent" electoral commission. The current composition of Parliament would prevent the ruling party from effecting necessary constitutional changes, but the electoral reform bill and other government policies would satisfy electoral principles agreed to at SADC's Mauritius summit. If the ruling party won at least a 2/3 majority in next year's elections, it would enact constitutional amendments to solidify and fine tune the electoral changes. Among the constitutional changes under discussion was the creation of an upper legislative house.

4. (C) Mnangagwa asserted that, in addition to legislative electoral reform, the GOZ was implementing additional relevant measures through administrative regulations. Other measures, such as a code of conduct worked out by the parties and a constructive role for churches, could further improve the electoral climate. Mnangagwa concluded that Zimbabwe was ahead of most SADC members in implementing the electoral principles and hoped that "the U.S. will see that we mean well for our people."

Party Congress to Showcase Achievements and Failures

5. (C) Mnangagwa confirmed that the ZANU-PF Party Congress would be held in Harare December 1-5. The Congress was conducted every five years to critique the ruling party's performance over the past five years and to chart its course for the next five. Previewing this year's exercise, Mnangagwa indicated that the party would feature land reform and the broadening of the commercial farm base as its principal achievement of the past five years. At the same time, the party would debate its shortcomings and focus on how to make the new economy more productive.

6. (C) Mnangagwa asserted that the GOZ's policies to combat HIV/AIDS, while not fully successful, were an important achievement. Zimbabwe was the first country in Africa to

implement an "AIDS levy", which even in this time of economic difficulty was funding critical programs to benefit infected and affected populations. Anti-retro virals were now being produced and disseminated in the country and wider distribution of nevarapine was a high priority in stemming mother to child transmission. The Ambassador interjected with a description of the levels and nature of extensive CDC and USAID HIV/AIDS-related assistance in Zimbabwe.

17. (C) The Speaker identified high unemployment as among the ruling party's perceived areas of failure. However, formal sector statistics belied the significant growth of employment in the informal sector, where he asserted many were doing quite well. One of the GOZ's challenges was to reduce nervousness about the informal sector and to position it to contribute more meaningfully to the fiscus. Stimulating small operators would be a priority in rehabilitating the economy. In the mining sector, for example, large tracts were reserved for multinational firms, such as Anglo-American, even though they had been unutilized for years. The GOZ intended to open up previously reserved dormant land for exploitation by small operators.

18. (C) The Speaker indicated that agriculture would remain the nation's principal engine of growth once confidence in the sector was restored. Most of the sector would rest on 99-year leases, although private ownership would remain to some extent. For government-owned leaseholds, the GOZ would dictate crop choices and set production targets for each province, but would leave portions of each property for personal use.

19. (C) Foreign relations was another subject that would require discussion at the Party Congress. The Party would have to account for the deterioration of relations with the United States, the UK, the EU, the World Bank and the IMF, which he attributed to Western opposition to land reform and how it was implemented. Notwithstanding existing tensions, though, the Speaker said the Party wanted to improve the lot of ordinary Zimbabweans and would "be delighted if old partners were with us, not against us."

110. (C) The Ambassador welcomed the Party's apparent shift of focus from the history of land reform to the challenge of how to make the economy more productive. He questioned the utility of government production targets and urged Zimbabwe to exploit market mechanisms to unlock the land's true potential. The Speaker accepted the Ambassador's offer to share with him a book by developmental economist Hernando de Soto on such issues. Finally, Mnangagwa expressed appreciation for the USAID-funded State University of New York program, which he said was making important contributions to the growing effectiveness of the Parliament's committee system.

Comment

111. (C) The Speaker's tone and substance conveyed an interest in better bilateral relations consistent with other recent encounters with senior GOZ officials. Nonetheless, there was nothing here to suggest the GOZ intends to engage in more than superficial gestures and public relations geared principally with SADC audiences to rehabilitate its stature. Mnangagwa's preview of the ruling party's economic policy prescriptions, with its heavy state role and atomization of the private sector, was especially disappointing. Conjuring up images of decades-old failed communist experiments elsewhere, it testified to the continued priority of political control over economic recovery within the leadership and the dearth of meaningful strategies to rehabilitate the once productive economy.

112. (C) We see no indication that Mnangagwa is any more willing than other senior ZANU-PF officials to countenance measures that could undermine the party's political dominance. However, the pragmatic political operator may be prepared to show a more moderate face, perhaps learning lessons from his 2000 loss to an MDC candidate for Parliament and his loss of the party chairmanship race the same year to John Nkomo. An NGO contact from Kwekwe reported that Mnangagwa recently instructed local party structures that he wanted to run a tolerant, non-violent MP election campaign that would not alienate those inside or outside the party. In the same vein, he has urged themes of tolerance and non-violence in national media broadcasts. Other NGO contacts have characterized him as "constructive" on numerous issues in the Parliament as long as ruling party control was not at stake. Local lawyers credit him as being the most effective Minister of Justice the nation has seen, although standards for that position have not been particularly high.

113. (C) Mnangagwa continues to be a central figure in the publicly quiet but fractious jockeying for position in the ruling party's putative succession race. Handicapping his

chances are his reputed unpopularity among party rank and file and his pivotal role in the Matabeleland massacres of the 1980s. Nonetheless, he retains considerable control over the party's pursestrings and reportedly commands the loyalty of many in the party's provincial hierarchies (who will be crucial in selection of a Vice-President to succeed the late Simon Muzenda) and the security apparatus. In any event, as with all pretenders to power here, his relative strength will hinge for now on the will of the President. The President reportedly allowed investigations of alleged Mnangagwa corruption to proceed earlier this year but ultimately intervened to save him from substantial damning evidence. If true, such reports imply that the President may intend to keep all pretenders off balance but in play, defending themselves and undercutting each other while he remains above the fray. As always, Mugabe has positioned himself to play the ball either way: should he ultimately pick Mnangagwa as his successor he can fireproof the Speaker against corruption charges by claiming that the allegations have already been investigated and dismissed as groundless.

DELL